

# **STATEMENT OF STEPHEN T. AYERS, AIA ACTING ARCHITECT OF THE CAPITOL**

## **Regarding the Capitol Visitor Center Project**

### **Subcommittee on Economic Development, Public Buildings, and Emergency Management, Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure U.S. House of Representatives**

**June 8, 2007**

Madam Chairwoman, Congressman Graves, and members of the Subcommittee, thank you for this opportunity to update you on the progress of the Capitol Visitor Center (CVC) project. We certainly appreciate the interest you all have taken in the project, and we appreciate that the Chairwoman recently toured the CVC. I would like to take a moment to provide a brief history of the project before discussing the latest construction progress.

Madam Chairwoman, the idea for a visitor center is not new. It dates back to the mid-1970s and several feasibility studies were conducted in the 1990s. The fatal shootings of two U.S. Capitol Police officers in July 1998 underscored the degree to which the building and its occupants are at risk. Therefore, in October 1998, Congress provided \$100 million in the 1999 Emergency Supplemental Appropriations bill for the planning, engineering, design, and construction of a visitor center.

The events of September 11, 2001, the anthrax attacks, and the war on terrorism further punctuated the need to enhance security in the Capitol. Understanding the need to screen visitors beyond the building, and wanting to provide basic amenities for visitors, Congress appropriated \$100 million to supplement the previous appropriation and the \$65 million in private donations that had been raised to begin construction of the Capitol Visitor Center in September 2001.

The first phase of construction began in summer 2002. However, before we could put a shovel in the ground, we had a number of pre-construction tasks to complete. We moved or made arrangements to protect historic trees. We removed and stored the Frederick Law Olmsted-designed lanterns and water fountains so we could reinstall them when the project is completed.

We constructed new visitor screening facilities, and installed ramps along the West Front to provide an ADA accessible path into the building. Offices located in the East Front Extension that were temporarily closed or relocated due to the construction were moved into alternate space.

Once the pre-construction work was completed, we began excavation of the site. The CVC is an underground, three-story structure encompassing 580,000 square feet of space. It is unique among underground structures in that it is an underground assembly, meeting, and museum facility. Over the course of the Sequence 1 work, we removed 60,000 truckloads or 4.2 million pounds of dirt from the East Front of the Capitol. Once full excavation was completed, we began pouring concrete for the outer perimeter walls, erecting steel columns, and installing the concrete roof slab and utilities.

The original intent for building the CVC was that one construction contract would be awarded that included excavation, structure, fit-out and finishes to be awarded in 2002. After September 11, significant scope changes, including fit-out of the expansion spaces, the installation of state-of-the-art security elements, and the addition of a new, pedestrian tunnel to the Jefferson Building, would have delayed the start of excavation by several months. Before this work could begin, it needed to be designed and funded, which would take several months to do.

This delay would have jeopardized meeting the Congressional requirement that the East Front be ready to support Inaugural activities in January 2005. Therefore, the construction package was divided into two contracts: A structure/foundation contract or Sequence 1, and a second contract, which would be awarded more than a year later, for installation of mechanical, electrical, and plumbing systems, fit-out and finishes, or Sequence 2.

The Sequence 2 contract was awarded in April 2003. This second phase of construction — which we are finishing up now — involves installation of electrical, mechanical, and plumbing services, and build-out of the facility including installation of all stone and finishing materials, and preparing the CVC for public use.

Madam Chairwoman, there is a third phase of construction. It is the \$85 million design and build-out of the House and Senate expansion space adjacent to the CVC. In November 2001, additional

funding was provided in the Legislative Branch Appropriations bill to finish the 170,000 square feet of space.

That brings us to the progress made to date. As you know, I assumed the duties of Acting Architect of the Capitol in February 2007. At that time, construction was 88 percent complete and numerous critical path milestones were being missed monthly.

One of my first actions as Acting Architect was to direct the project team to re-evaluate the project schedule to ensure it was realistic and to include the two major risks that were not built into the schedule or into the fire and life-safety acceptance testing plan. Those risks are (1) the commissioning of building systems, and (2) acceptance testing of fire, security, and life-safety systems to include testing to ensure the building systems and fire and life-safety systems are integrated and work together properly.

By April, the Project Team, under the direction of Mr. Doug Jacobs, had updated the master project schedule to incorporate these specific risks and contingencies, particularly with regard to the time needed to integrate the fire alarm, life-safety, and security systems with the building systems. It is important to note that since the completion of the schedule re-assessment in April, for the third month in a row, all critical path activities have been met as scheduled. This is the first time in the history of the project that this has occurred.

With construction now 95 percent complete, major construction activities will start winding down this summer. The tasks now left to do largely involve the aesthetics and functionality of the space such as painting and installation of carpet, lighting fixtures, and hand railings, as well as the tie-in of building systems. The final and most complex challenges ahead are the acceptance testing of the fire, security, and life-safety systems and the commissioning of the sophisticated building systems.

The final testing of the fire and life-safety systems is scheduled to begin this fall. Our expectation continues to be that a Certificate of Occupancy can be issued in June 2008. Last month, representatives from our Fire Marshal's office tested a mock-up of the CVC fire alarm system. Programming codes and device operation and sequencing was reviewed and tested. The initial results were considered very positive. This process and the increased coordination between the Fire

Marshal and the fire alarm subcontractor during the pre-testing process will help minimize delays and reprogramming requirements during the final testing process.

With regard to commissioning the building systems, air balancing of all of the air handlers must be completed before the Fire Marshal can commence testing of the smoke control system. At this time, all but one of the CVC's 23 air handling units are operational or available for operation. "Rough" balancing has been completed in several of the public areas of the Visitor Center — Great Hall, Food Service Area, Exhibition Gallery, and Orientation Theaters. "Final" balancing activities can continue after the contractor's smoke testing.

I continue to work closely with the CVC project team to ensure that the project continues to move forward based on a realistic schedule. Completing this project is a top priority for me and this Agency and I have directed the team to come to me immediately when any issues arise. They have been working hard over the past several months to stem delays and cost increases.

A new member of the team is Mr. Bernie Ungar, who joins me at the table today. Mr. Ungar became CVC Project Executive on May 23. He is very familiar with the history of the CVC and has a working knowledge of the project having been a part of it since the groundbreaking as part of the Government Accountability Office's team conducting management reviews and audits of the project. His leadership will help bridge the gap between the AOC and GAO as we work to complete construction.

Madam Chairwoman, the Project Team and I are very serious in our commitment to complete this project as expeditiously and as safely as possible while maintaining the exceptional quality of the work in the facility. Each month approximately \$4.5 million of work is being executed and hundreds of construction contractors are working on the site daily. I will continue to communicate with the Subcommittee and Congressional leadership in an open dialogue to keep them apprised of our progress and any issues that arise. The AOC, the CVC Project Team and I are dedicated to providing Congress and the American people with a Visitor Center of which we can all be proud.

## **PROJECT UPDATE**

### ***Operations Planning***

With regard to the operation of the CVC, on April 12, I received a letter from House and Senate Leadership assigning the management of CVC operations and administration to the AOC. I immediately stood-up a support team that has begun working to transition the CVC from a construction project to a fully staffed and equipped visitor services operation.

David Ferguson, our Chief Administrative Officer, is leading this transition team full-time. In this role, he is overseeing CVC operational planning for the AOC and coordinating with our consulting team from JM Zell Partners, and House and Senate leadership on areas such as administration, food service, gift shops, information technology, and exhibits.

One of our top priorities is to recruit a Chief Executive Officer for Visitor Services (CEOVS). Once this person is hired, other staffing of CVC operations can begin. The CEOVS will be responsible for the overall operation of the CVC and the implementation of the policies and programs that fulfill the CVC's mission of security, visitor comfort, and education. I am pleased to report that the interview process for the Chief Executive Officer for Visitor Services has begun. The plan is to have someone on board by this fall. We have already begun to hire staff to attend to the facility's maintenance which report to the Capitol Superintendent's Office.

In addition, the CVC food service contract was awarded effective May 31, 2007, to Restaurant Associates. Restaurant Associates provides food services to a number of well-known museums, performing art centers, and institutions, including The National Gallery of Art; The John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts; and the Smithsonian Institution; National Museum of American History; National Museum of Natural History; National Museum of the American Indian; and the Reynold's Center/Portrait Gallery.

Other operational issues that we will be working with Congressional leadership on include an advanced reservation system, developing a CVC Web site, stocking and staffing gift shops, developing position descriptions for staff, and reaching out to community, tour industry, and business groups with a public information campaign, to name a few.

### ***Construction Update***

As I mentioned earlier, most of the work remaining to be done involves installation of finish materials throughout the site. Light fixture installation has begun in the Great Hall; carpet installation continues in House and Senate Expansion Spaces; exhibit case components are being placed inside the Exhibition Hall; and millwork is nearly complete on both levels of the Congressional Auditorium.

In addition, in the House Expansion Space, the stone work in the Hearing Room is progressing and should be done this month. Work in the Radio and TV Gallery space is expected to be finished in July, and the ongoing carpet installation in the House Intelligence Committee space marks the near completion of that area.

Outside, the 12-foot-high bronze entrance doors have been installed in the CVC's north and south entrances. The cab components for the exterior elevators are being installed on the East Front Plaza, and the grounds are being readied for sod and other plantings following the installation of an irrigation system.

Madam Chair, we are committed to getting the CVC project finished as quickly as possible. As I noted previously, it is my top priority and the top priority of this Agency. This one-of-a-kind facility was conceived as an extension of the Capitol, offering open access to all people in a safe and secure environment so that they may witness the workings of democracy and the legislative process. The CVC also will enhance the visitor experience by eliminating the long lines where tourists had to stand in the heat, the rain, or the cold; providing greater comfort and accessibility, including plenty of restrooms and a cafeteria and other necessary amenities; as well as new educational opportunities for our children and our children's children through interactive exhibits and an orientation film.

At this time, we are on track to meet our scheduled June 2008 date to receive the Certificate of Occupancy. Nonetheless, we recognize that the project continues to face risks and uncertainties and are instituting additional steps to increase our focus on meeting our scheduled completion dates.

We will continue to closely monitor the progress of the building systems commissioning and the fire and life-safety system testing to mitigate potential delays, and we look forward to continuing to work with Congressional leadership as we begin staffing the operations and effectively and seamlessly work to transition the CVC from a construction project to a fully staffed and equipped visitor services operation.

This concludes my statement. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.